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Unrecognized self-judgments, experiments related to the "wolff-phenomenon"

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the preceding study it appears that no clear-cut linear relationship between the dimension "extraversion-introversion" and the favorableness of the distorted handwriting can be established. A tendency toward a curvilinear relationship, however, is suggested by the data.

It is nevertheless unavoidable to admit that our research did not lead to the findings we had expected. Not only did we reject our hypothesis predicting a relationship between the personality variable "extraversion" and the favorableness of the unrecognized self-judgment, but the findings also have more far-reaching consequences in that the originally intended purpose for undertaking this study has only partially been achieved.

To recapitulate: in the introduction to this study we motivated our interest for the "Wolff-phenomenon" by pointing out its possible diagnostic usefulness. For, if unambiguous relationships could be established between certain personality variables (of which some are difficult to operationalize) and the "Wolff-phenomenon" (for which data easily can be obtained), our findings would contribute to the facilitation of psychodiagnosis.

Unfortunately, our expectation proved to be wrong. Frustrating as it might be for the researcher who invested much time and energy in trying to demonstrate the predicted relationships, he is nevertheless obliged to cite all his unsuccessful attempts of confirming his hypothesis. Therefore we committed ourselves to extensively publish the unexpected results.

Does this imply that our research efforts have been in vain? We believe not, because our research did focus on a topic of personality research which up until now had only partly been explored. We have been able to demonstrate that the "Wolff-phenomenon" exists independently of techniques used so far. Moreover, the literature on the "Wolff-

phenomenon" is gathered and presented in a review. In this way the diverse techniques which have been applied and the various results of the studies can easily be compared.

WOLFF's work is not very well-known in psychological literature. This in itself is amazing, as we consider his findings to be quite intriguing and striking. The reason, however, for this relative neglect of the "Wolff-phenomenon" may be related to the difficulties one encounters in attempting to interpret the phenomenon. The interpretations one can give are related to distinct theoretical frameworks:

1. *The psychoanalytic framework*

WOLFF interprets his findings in terms of the psychoanalytic psychology, and his assumptions are the active influence of the defense mechanisms *repression* and *projection*. When a subject is confronted with his own unrecognized personal product, he gives a "depth" judgment, as a result of repression and projection. WOLFF writes..."it was found that the unconscious self-judgment showed more tensions of personality than the judgments on others. We called such judgments deep judgments". (o.c. p. 82) WOLFF defines the concept "deep judgment" as follows: "A judgment is called a 'deep judgment' only when the judge's own words suggest that he wishes to distinguish between surface characteristics and underlying tendencies". (o.c. p. 69) Elsewhere WOLFF writes...."We can observe in the subject not only the relation between resistance and non-recognition but also one between resistance and wish images. When the self-judgments on different forms of expression are compared, those on handwriting show not only the strongest resistance but also the most expressive wish images". (o.c. p. 118) In short; WOLFF believed that the unrecognized self-judgments were deep judgments and revealed unconscious wish images, resulting in an extreme way of reacting.

2. *The personalistic framework*

HUNTLEY prefers an interpretation of the favorable self-judgments in terms of ego-involvement and rejects WOLFF's idea of wish images. HUNTLEY writes:.. "That

there are such strategies as self-justification, rationalization, projection, and compensation can only be explained by admitting the presence of strivings for self-esteem". (o.c. p. 425) And elsewhere... "We have assumed that the strivings for self-esteem may operate automatically and below the level of conscious report" (o.c. p. 427) When the subject is giving a judgment of himself without his knowledge that he is judging himself, the *strivings for self-esteem* will be aroused and a positive self-justification is the result. Especially when there is partial recognition of the personal product as the subject's own, the "ego" is threatened and the urge for self-justification is even stronger. As a result the self-judgment is as favorable as possible. When the personal product has been recognized, the given judgment is more moderate, stemming from fear of giving a pretentious impression on oneself.

3. *The behavioristic framework.*

From the behavioristic point of view an interpretation of the favorableness of the unrecognized self-judgment is the following:

Each time a subject is confronted with a specimen of a personal product in order to give a judgment of it, the stimulus will evoke a certain amount of insecurity. In the series of presentations the subject's own personal product is also presented for judgment. The assumption is that in those particular cases where the subject has to give a judgment of his own personal product, a feeling of familiarity is evoked subliminally. The distorted self-product does, as compared to the personal products of others evoke a certain amount of confidence. The own personal product functions as an *anxiety reductor* in a situation where a series of insecurity producing items has been presented. It is a familiar stimulus in an unfamiliar context. The subject experiences a positive feeling, which leads to a favorable judgment of oneself.

Presenting these three interpretations of the "Wolff-phenomenon" does not imply that other interpretations from different points of view are not feasible. For, as DE GROOT

states: "...different interpretations of identical materials are not mutually exclusive logically". (o.c. p. 311)

Personally, however, we find WOLFF's own interpretation of his findings the least satisfactory. In our opinion the favorableness of the unrecognized self-judgment can not be interpreted conclusively by his assumption of the active influence of the defense mechanisms repression and projection. For, repression, is by definition, the defense mechanism coming into effect when a painful or unpleasant feeling is evoked in a person. WOLFF solves this problem by letting the repression mechanism function as the lead of a "guiding ideal", which counteracts the unpleasant or painful experience and allows the person to judge himself according to his wish image.

Further research might possibly generate new empirical data, supporting our previously mentioned criticism, namely by confirming those interpretations of the "Wolff-phenomenon" which imply the idea of subliminal recognition. It is obvious that in that case a reformulation of the description of the "Wolff-phenomenon" would be necessary. For, in using the term subliminal "recognition" with regard to the "Wolff-phenomenon" it hardly can be justified to refer to the "Wolff-phenomenon" at the same time in terms of an "un-recognized" process.